



Police Department

August 22, 2012

Dear Alarm Permit Holder:

Chula Vista is one of the safest communities in the nation when compared to cities of similar size. Your police department's primary mission is to keep it that way, but the department faces significant challenges to meet that goal now and into the future.

Since the worldwide financial crisis struck in 2008 the City's budget has been reduced drastically, and public safety staffing has been decreased significantly. The police department currently has approximately 40 fewer sworn officers than it did in 2008, a nearly 16% reduction. My concerns about the department's ability to provide quality services are shared by other city leaders. Those concerns led us to engage the Matrix Consulting Group of Palo Alto to do a comprehensive study of police department staffing and operational practices.

The study found that our uniformed officers require significant additional time to conduct proactive enforcement duties to reduce criminal activity, to respond to citizens' calls for service within reasonable timeframes, and to attend to quality of life issues that persist within our community.

The study found the department must: 1) add a significant number of staff; 2) modify a number of its operational practices; and 3) purchase and improve a number of software/hardware systems. One of the top recommendations was to adopt Verified Response to reduce the number of false burglar alarms to which police respond (in 2011, Chula Vista officers responded to over 5,600 false alarms). Under Verified Response, a break-in must be verified by an alarm company before police are dispatched (unless a neighbor witnesses a burglary or a homeowner finds evidence of a break-in). Verified Response is not a new concept; in fact there are many municipalities throughout the nation that have implemented Verified Response with very positive results. The study concluded the department likely will realize a 90% reduction in dispatches to both false residential and false commercial alarms; based on our own internal analysis, I concur.

The facts about Verified Response provide a compelling argument for its adoption. Historically, 99% of all residential and commercial burglar alarms dispatched to uniformed officers in Chula Vista have been false. This is a statistic that is repeated in city after city throughout the United States. Federal, state and local regulation schemes, fine structures, education efforts, and other measures have failed to significantly reduce false alarms in Chula Vista and elsewhere.

Verified Response is the #1 recommendation by the United States Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. The COPS office and studies done by other law enforcement groups have shown that Verified Response results in substantially reduced response times to actual crimes, reduced administrative costs of managing alarm programs, reduced annual subsidies by taxpayers to for-profit alarm companies, and additional time for patrol officers to problem-solve, pursue more arrests, and conduct other proactive enforcement activities.

I have carefully considered the recommendation to adopt Verified Response, and I am confident it will deliver results that are right for public safety in Chula Vista. Verified Response is but one of the steps your police department must undertake to keep the city safe. We must also follow through with the remainder of the study's recommendations for operational practice changes, staffing realignments/additions, and equipment enhancements in order to be successful. **We simply cannot afford to jeopardize our ability to keep Chula Vista safe by continuing to send our officers to more than 5,600 false burglar alarms each year.**

Please join us to learn more about Chula Vista's Verified Response to burglar alarms at 6 p.m. Wednesday August 29, 2012. My staff and I will present information before the Chula Vista City Council's Public Safety Subcommittee at Olympian High School located at 1925 Magdalena Avenue, Chula Vista, 91913. You may also get more information about Verified Response by visiting our website at www.chulavistapd.org.

Sincerely,

David Bejarano
Chief of Police

Residents and business owners with alarm systems might have questions and concerns about Verified Response. Below are Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about this program. Please take a moment to read through this information. It may dispel myths about Verified Response.

Q: What is the problem with burglar (intrusion) alarms in Chula Vista?

A: Human error, equipment malfunction, and improper installation are some of the most common causes of false alarms. During the past three years (7/1/09-6/30/12), 99.7% of all residential alarms have been false, and 98.6% of commercial alarms have been false. These false calls make up 9% of all calls handled by the police department. In fact, “false burglar alarm” was the #1 call type for police officers in Chula Vista during this 3-year period.

Q: What does Verified Response mean?

A: An alarm has been activated, and a person, such as a security guard, is on the premises to verify that a crime may be occurring or has occurred; or an alarm company is monitoring the premises by using either remote audio or video and believes that a crime may be occurring or has occurred. Police respond to the alarm only after an actual problem has been verified.

Q: How will the Chula Vista community benefit from Verified Response?

A: Verified Response will enhance public safety in a number of ways. Just some of these are:

- It frees up very limited police resources to focus on actual crimes
- It reduces response times to urgent calls, such as domestic violence and other violent crimes
- It allows officers to work proactively on crime and disorder problems that have been identified as top community priorities in resident surveys and through the analysis of police calls
- It frees up officers to spend additional time on solving problems and improving the quality of life for Chula Vista residents

Q: Won't burglaries increase if police respond only to verified alarms?

A: In 2006, Sonitrol, a member of the alarm industry, led a research effort to look at this question via a survey of 20 communities that had implemented Verified Response. According to the report, “contrary to fears that Verified Response would lead to skyrocketing burglary rates, 69% of the 16 jurisdictions providing data show the rate declined following adoption of Verified Response, while 31% experienced increases. Most, however, cautioned they couldn't draw a direct correlation between Verified

Response implementation and the burglary rate. Further, four agencies provided data showing the incidents of arrests increased under Verified Response.” For further detail on Sonitrol’s research on the impact of Verified Response on burglary rates, see p. 10 of the full report at: <http://www.mnicholscomm.com/pdfs/VR-WhitePaper-FINAL.pdf>

Q: Don’t burglar alarms help police capture criminals?

A: No. Burglar alarms alert police to a possible break-in after it has occurred. During the past three years (7/1/09-6/30/12), Chula Vista officers responded to 8,094 residential burglar alarms, but only one incident resulted in a burglary arrest. During the same time period, officers responded to 9,646 commercial burglar alarms, but just six incidents resulted in arrests. These extremely low apprehension figures are not surprising, given the very short amount of time burglars typically spend inside a home or business and the time it takes officers to respond. (The average response time to burglar alarm calls that came into the department between 7/1/09 and 6/30/12 was 16 minutes, 58 seconds. In just the past year, the average response time to alarms has increased to 19 minutes, 18 seconds)

Q: What about robbery or panic alarms?

A: The police department will continue to respond to duress, panic and robbery alarms without prior verification.

Q: What’s the best way to protect my home from a burglar?

A: There are a number of effective ways to prevent a burglary, which is largely a crime of opportunity. The primary way to prevent burglaries is to lock all doors and windows. This may sound obvious, but a number of burglaries do not involve forced entry. Another way to deter burglars is to make it seem like you are home by leaving a TV or radio on when you leave, and to close your blinds so thieves can’t see what valuables you have. Installing a motion-activated outdoor light has been shown to deter nighttime burglaries. According to interviews with burglars, they hate dogs; if you like and can have pets, a dog is a good security investment. Finally, an alarm or security system, or even just an alarm sign in your yard, may deter burglars.

Q: Don’t my taxes pay for alarm responses by the police department?

A: 89% of Chula Vista households do not have intrusion alarms. The contract between alarm users and alarm companies is between only those two parties. Because 99.7% of these alarms are false, continued police responses to these alarms ignores the needs of those without alarms.

Q: Why doesn’t the city just increase false alarm fines and hire more officers?

A: The revenue from such a strategy would be unpredictable, and hiring officers to fulfill the private contract between alarm companies and their customers would be irresponsible public policy.

Q: Isn't it true that a small number of alarm systems cause a majority of false alarms?

A: No, a review of 2009 data found that the first and second false alarms at locations accounted for 84% of the total number in the Chula Vista.

Several studies and reports have been published on the impact of Verified Response. Links to some of these documents are listed below:

- http://www.popcenter.org/problems/false_alarms/4/
- http://www.popcenter.org/problems/pdfs/false_alarms_2nded.pdf
- http://slcpd.com/c0ntent/uploads/multiple_cities_endorse_VR.pdf

If you have additional questions or concerns, please consider attending a presentation on Verified Response before the Chula Vista City Council's Public Safety Subcommittee on Wednesday, August 29, at 6 p.m. at Olympian High School. The school is located at 1925 Magdalena Avenue, Chula Vista, 91913. Or, if it's more convenient, please also feel free to contact us at verifiedresponse@chulavistapd.org.